

Post Adoption Newsletter

Winter 2014

Dear CCAI family,

We understand the long journey you have traveled to bring your child into your family – and now you have embarked on a new journey as a family! Our goal is to continue to provide support for the challenges and joys of adoptive parenting. We hope you will find these newsletters helpful, and invite you to contact us if you have any suggestions of topics that might be helpful for the next issue!

Missed our last issue? Check out our Post Adoption page by logging in at www.ccaifamily.org!

CCAI Updates

For those families in the Denver area, our new Post Adoption Center class schedule is available. If you are interested, please contact our office.

CCAI has begun working on a new project to help older children in China be better prepared to be adopted prior to the adoption process, and also to better support those families that choose to adopt an older child (above age 5). If you have adopted an older child and would like to share your thoughts on what you wish your child had been told before the adoption or what supports you think need to be in place, please let us know!

CCAI's Xpress Yourself @ program, a play and art therapy group for children ages 7-12 focused on adoption and birth parent issues, has been successful in Colorado for several years. In an attempt to expand the program to other states, a web-based training is being held February 20, 2014 at 11:00 AM MST. If you would be interested in this training coming to your area and know a social worker, counselor, or other professional individual who is comfortable running children's groups who would like to attend, please contact Heather Diaz at postadoption@ccaifamily.org for more information on the program and cost of training.

Check out more updates and keep connected with CCAI!

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Fall 2013 Statistics September-October- November-December

6 Traditional Program
children were matched
98 Waiting Children were
matched
128 children came home
from China
and
8 children came home
from Haiti with a forever
family!

Overcoming the Language Barrier with Non-English Speaking Young Children

By Nancy S. Fontaine, Ph.D.

During the adoption process we were informed by our social worker to expect that our new daughter from China would most likely be a bit delayed. When I was united with her on March 10, 2002, in Guangxi Province, it was clear that this beautiful little 16-month-old was, indeed, more like a 10-month-old. At that time, her developmental information stated that she was able to produce a few Cantonese words such as “mama” and “baba.” Perhaps this was the case back at the orphanage. I am sure that she took one look at my strange blond-haired, blue-eyed face and heard the weird sounds coming out of my mouth and thought, “Who are you lady?”

After the initial shock reaction in China, my lovely daughter went into shut-down mode. My quiet, reserved little girl wasn't doing much communicating except crying out of frustration at our not understanding what she wanted. Having a child development and early childhood education background, I found myself applying information and techniques that I had previously taught or modeled to others. It was a challenging learning experience, to say the least. The following specific guidelines are offered as points for understanding how to set up experiences and activities that are rich in language and communication.

- Language emerges from natural conversations between a child and his/her caregiver, so take advantage of naturally occurring events in a child's world. A bug crawling across the windshield while we drive is a nuisance, a traffic light that stays red is aggravating, and McDonald's golden arches give us heartburn. To a young child, bugs are the most fascinating of creatures, the red of traffic lights remind them of a toy of the same color at home, and those big yellow curvy things in the sky smell great as we pass them.
- Attempts need to be encouraged rather than corrected. Although we may read that adults need to use proper words rather than “baby talk,” attempts at a new skill need reinforcement. Correction can come very informally; for example, if a child says, “Buggies fly!” We can respond with, “My goodness, the bug flies! You saw the bug fly!” This approach is more positive than telling the child the word is not “buggy” and giving the correction.
- Expansion is the main technique I used with Jenna when she began to use a few words. Her first actual English word was, “dog.” In watching her face, seeing what she was looking at and what the dog was doing, I was able to expand upon her one word. I replied, “Yes, Jenna. The dog is outside barking. I wonder what he is barking at. Funny dog!” After that we focused quite a bit of time on the dog and went to discover what he had heard or seen. It turned into a full discussion (me doing all the talking at first). After that, Jenna used the word “dog” extensively, and quickly she began to use two-word phrases.
- Silence does not necessarily mean that communication is not taking place. Silence often means someone is thinking, processing, or daydreaming. Unless it is a dangerous situation, learn to wait a few seconds more than is typically comfortable for you before responding. Chances are the child may be able to actually complete the response without any assistance.
- Sometimes the rate you speak or number of thoughts may need to be decreased. A good rule of thumb is to communicate one sentence at a time based on age. A child that is two can most likely only process two statements at one time. This includes directions and commands such as “Go take off your shoes and put them in the closet.” A two year old will attend to those statements, that is, unless he or she hears one or two more!
- Action- and play-oriented activities that involve the senses (taste, touch, smell, hearing, vision) stimulate communication to a greater degree than activities that just involve watching or listening. While reading



books together is a marvelous activity, how enriched stories would be if they were acted out or connected with a cooking or singing.

- While working in the kitchen, changing a diaper, driving, or taking a shower, etc., put words to your actions and tell the child what you are doing. Children learn to connect words with actions and objects just by watching and hearing adults during daily routines.

Of all the language and communication strategies we used with Jenna, I have to say that a sense of humor goes a long way. It helps keep us sane and lets children be able to see us as real people. I will always remember one noteworthy experience where a sense of humor helped me have a better perspective. Every night before she went to sleep, Jenna would lie in my arms as I rocked her in the rocking chair. Every time I would bend down and whisper in her ear, "I have a secret to tell you.... I love you... I will always love you." I did this faithfully and also hoped that one day, she would have the feelings, desires, and words to say those wonderful words to me. One night, lo and behold, Jenna pulled my head down as I rocked her to sleep. She said to me that she had a "secret." My heart went straight into my soul and I was elated. Jenna finally wanted and could communicate her love for me. As I was bending down, I heard these sweet words, "dog poop." After recovering from my disappointment, realizing that we had a related incident that day, I thought to myself, "Well, at least she used a two-word phrase!"

Jenna Grace Nian Xing is now 3 ½ and never seems to NOT be talking. Incidentally, she finally did say she loved me during a totally unexpected moment when she was 19 months old. I was reading her a book. That moment will forever stay in my mind as she said to me, "I love you, Mommy."

The Power of Dance and Movement

By Sajit Greene, MA, LPC, DTR

Cultures around the globe have traditionally used dance to bring people together, enact rites of passage, promote healing, and provide an emotional outlet during times of celebration and times of sorrow. Dance and movement can also have a powerful role in the lives of adopted children. Even if you don't consider yourself a "dancer," any parent can use simple and fun dance-like activities to cultivate their relationships with their children. For young children and adolescents, movement games and dance opportunities enhance social development and encourage creative self-expression. For children in need of extra support and healing, dance can even be used as a profound form of therapy.



Movement is every child's first language, and it is a dialogue in movement that first brings parent and child together in the dance of attachment. The attachment process is a spontaneous dance where touch, facial expressions, body movements, vocalizations, and subtle rhythms are used to communicate a sense of understanding, empathy, love, and connection. This early dance of relationship creates the template for building and sustaining relationships, throughout life.

Regardless of the age of your child, you can consciously use the power of movement to enhance your communication and strengthen your feelings of connection. Especially with infants and toddlers, take time to tune in to how your child is moving. Observe the subtle and not-so-subtle rhythms of her movements as well as seeing the shape of how her arms, legs, and torso are moving through space. Listen to what your child is saying without words. Engage in the dance by matching the quality of your child's movements, her rhythms, and level of intensity. Is she clapping? Twisting? Throwing things? Jumping? Does she want to play chasing games? Become like a mirror, reflecting back what you see and feel. You can make it a playful game, and you can use music to make it even more like a dance.

When you join your child in her dance, she feels understood and accepted, and it can be a lot of fun for both of you.

When a child's movements are distressing or disruptive, you might need to find creative ways to help your child modify her dance. For example, gentle stroking that is done in the same rhythm that your baby uses when she sucks on her bottle may help a fussy infant fall asleep. Or, a child who is biting or hitting can be encouraged to channel that energy into banging on pots and pans or tearing up pieces of paper.



As children begin to spend more time with their peers, they engage in social games that are based on movement. Remember “Ring Around the Rosie,” “Follow the Leader,” “Red Light/Green Light,” and the “Hokey Pokey?” Through these games, children learn important social skills, develop body awareness, and master developmental tasks. You might encourage a shy child to join in when other children are playing these types of games, or you might need to seek out opportunities for your child to learn and participate in such games.

Movement games and social dances can also be incorporated into family playtime. You and your family might enjoy coming up with your own ideas for movement games, or you might create your own dances. For example, you might put on music that your children enjoy and gather the family together in a circle. Everyone can take turns leading the movement, or you can take turns dancing in the middle of the circle.



Of course, dance can also be an art form and a means of creative expression. In most cities, there are many types of dance classes available for young children and adolescents. You might take your child to see a few different styles of dance and find out what type of dance she likes best. While many people are familiar with ballet, tap, and jazz, your child might want to connect with her cultural roots by studying Chinese dance or Tai Chi. Maybe she will feel the call of the drums of African dance. Maybe she wants to learn yoga, martial arts, creative dance, or hip hop. Learning movement-based disciplines can build your child’s self-esteem and confidence while enhancing physical prowess, coordination, and grace. Dance also provides a creative outlet for the expression of feelings and lets your child experience the sheer joy of movement.

Adopted children who are faced with attachment difficulties, post-traumatic stress disorder, developmental delays, physical disabilities, emotional problems, behavioral problems, or issues related to cultural and racial identity may benefit from the therapeutic use of dance. Dance/Movement therapy is a form of psychotherapy that provides a non-verbal, playful, and creative approach to healing, and it works very well with children of all ages. It can be used for individual or group therapy, with parent-child dyads, and with families.

When dealing with attachment problems, a dance/movement therapist can help parents better attune to their child and bring more awareness and harmony to the relationship-building process. In dance/movement therapy groups, children learn social skills and develop the ability to identify and express feelings that perhaps they can’t put into words. Moving together, in a group, also gives children a powerful experience of acceptance and belonging.



Whether working individually or in a group, dance/movement therapy can help children become more aware of their body boundaries, gain more self-control, improve communication skills, and improve their ability to modulate their emotions. Because dance/movement therapy uses non-verbal interventions and works with the parts of the nervous system that are involved in the processing of traumatic experiences, this is an effective modality for healing early trauma.

In Denver, the Joyous Chinese Cultural Center offers several classes that incorporate dance and movement. To find a dance/movement therapist in your area, contact the American Dance Therapy Association (www.adta.org).

Perhaps you always thought of dance as a sophisticated art, a fun social activity, a silly children’s game, or simply a way to get some exercise. While dance is all of these things, it is so much more. It is the ability of dance to strengthen relationships, facilitate developmental progress, enhance self-expression, and heal wounds that makes dance a valuable resource in the lives of adopted children. Enjoy the dance!

Featured Child

In each newsletter, we'd like to feature a picture of a CCAI family or adoptee who have made the journey home! If you have a great picture to share, or are interested in being featured in our newsletter, send your picture and a short caption or story to postadoption@ccaifamily.org.



This little cutie is Luca, who is three years old and from Zhumadian, Henan. He is an awesome little guy, and bringing lots of joy to his new family!

Post Adoption Requirements

China

New program (families with a travel notice after 8/1/2011): Six reports are required at 1 month, 6 months, 1 year, 2 years, 3 years, and 5 years. Each report must have 8 pictures. The first report should include pictures from “gotcha” day and registration day. All reports should include at least one individual picture and one family picture, or pictures that include parents. Pictures can be emailed directly to the Post Adoption Department. Additional requirements are:

- Essay: written by the adopted child for any report occurring while they are 10 years old or older.
- Certificate of citizenship: included with the 6 month report, or as soon as it is obtained.
- 1 year report will include:
 - Special Needs Child Feedback
- 2 year, 3 year, and 5 year reports will include:
 - Medical Checkup Certificate
 - School Evaluation (if applicable)

The essay form, special needs child feedback form, medical checkup certificate, and school evaluation forms are CCCWA forms, provided to families by the Post Adoption Department and available on our website, www.ccaifamily.org, once families log in.

Haiti

Two reports are required at 6 months and 12 months. Each report must have 4 pictures, including one individual picture and one family picture, or pictures with parents. Pictures can be emailed directly to the Post Adoption Department.

For any questions or concerns, to submit any post adoption paperwork or pictures, or to suggest future newsletter topics, please contact postadoption@ccaifamily.org.